

**REPORT TO:** Scrutiny and Overview Committee

6<sup>th</sup> March 2018

**LEAD OFFICER:** Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development

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## **Development Management Performance**

### **Purpose**

1. To update Scrutiny and Overview Committee on performance and on-going service improvements within the Development Management Service.

### **Recommendations**

2. It is recommended that Committee notes the report.

### **Background and considerations**

3. This report comes following a request from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee to receive an update on planning performance.

### **Performance**

4. Overall the performance remains strong for April – December 2017, with the service continuing to achieve the Governments targets each quarter with only a slight dip in the major performance in July, due to 2 major appeals being decided (refer Appendix 1,2 &3).
5. Data is generally showing that the overall number of applications, the on-hand figure and officer caseload is reducing month on month. This is due not only to a reduction in the number of applications being submitted but also to an increased focus on decisions being issued (refer Appendix 4).
6. However, for the last quarter, 689 planning applications were received compared to the previous quarter of 583. This increase of applications submitted has led to a slight drop in validation performance on the previous quarter (refer appendix 5 & 6).
7. More positively, continued focus on the efficient management of caseloads means that over the last quarter, the use of extension of time requests (134 requests as compared with 176 and 214 in Q2 and Q1 respectively) has continued to fall, meaning that performance is being maintained without the need to have agreed time extensions beyond national targets (refer appendix 7).

### **Designation**

8. The Joint Director of Planning and Business Manager met with Martin Hutchings from PAS (Planning Advisory Service) in February to discuss South Cambridgeshire position on designation. PAS confirmed that SCDC performance in respect of “quality of decision making”, means that the Authority, along with some 14 other authorities, has exceeded the performance threshold set by government and is at risk of “designation” by the government. PAS have indicated that a letter would be sent, outlining the next stages to designation to all affect authorities but have not been able to advise the Councils as to when. PAS have also outlined the governments support proposals that can be provided to authorities facing designation. In the event that the

Secretary of State writes to the Council, an opportunity will be given to SCDC to request the Secretary of State not to formally designate the Authority – for which a detailed submission will need to be made.

9. SCDC is at risk of designation solely because of its “performance” on major planning appeals. 31 major appeal decisions were made in the designation period (a two-year period ending in Dec 2017), of which 22 related to 5 yr land supply applications. Of these;
  - i. 17 were allowed (of which 14 related to 5 yr land supply)
  - ii. 14 were dismissed (of which 6 related to 5 yr land supply)
  - iii. 7 were allowed following officer delegated refusals
  - iv. 8 were allowed following member overturns
  - v. 2 were allowed following appeal for non- determination
10. If the 5 yr land supply applications were taken out of the above figures, South Cambridgeshire’s percentage against major appeals decisions allowed would be 1.92% compared to the 10% threshold (refer appendix 8).

### **Housing Delivery**

11. For the last quarter 14 S106’s were completed and permissions issued. These will deliver 3025 homes including approx. 900 affordable homes. Included in the 14 completed S106’s, is the site for Cambourne West for development of up to 2,350 homes.
12. Ensuring the completion of a number of key S106 agreements associated with major residential applications is our current focus – particularly having regard to the scrutiny the service will potentially face from PAS. These are being actively tracked on a fortnightly basis.
13. Land Charges forms an important part of our service. Ensuring searches are carried out in a timely manner is critical to help those buying/moving home. The team continue to process land searches within the national 10-day target. There is no backlog, a position which has been sustained since April 2017 and for the last quarter the team has been processing land searches in an average 6 days.

### **Customer Service**

14. It is acknowledged that improvement still needs to be made in this area.
15. Recently we have changed our process and we have added a dedicated resource to log service requests, compliments and to track and address complaints. Complainants are now contacted by a member of the business support team, we talk with the complainant about their concerns and how they would like it resolved. This approach is beginning to show benefits with some more positive feedback being given. The number of compliments received for the last quarter was 23, compared to 9 only received for the previous quarter (refer appendix 9).
16. Following on from last year’s successful planning open day, a programme of open evenings in locations around the district and with the City will begin in March. The first on 5<sup>th</sup> March at Northstowe will build upon the lessons learnt from last year with advice and guidance sessions aimed at residents and potential DIY’ers, provided by officers from the planning team. The programme will continue into the early autumn at venues in SCDC and the City. This will help promote the work of the Council and help give planning guidance to residents and local businesses.

### **Improved use of Data**

17. Data is showing a downward trend for the number of applications received since April 2016. This trend is across all three categories, majors, minors and others. Whilst exhibiting some significant variance, officers will continue to monitor activity closely having regard to the potential budget and resource impacts and requirements (refer appendix 10,11,12 & 13).

### **Shared Planning Service**

18. Following the appointment of the Joint Director of Planning and Economic Development, the project to implement the shared planning service is continuing. Consultation with staff has recently closed around the management structure and the service is developing the ICT specification, alongside reviewing areas of common and overlapping activity, with the objective of aligning DM practices where appropriate through 2018. SCDC and City Council Planning staff are also being deployed across the authority boundaries to maximise capacity/capability as the service seeks to respond to work demands. The project remains on track to deliver the phased implementation of the service through 2018 and 2019.

### **Implications**

19. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk management, equality and diversity, climate change, community safety and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered.

### **Legal**

20. Monthly meetings with officers and 3C Legal to oversee work programmes, identifying and escalating key issues are proving beneficial. The focus at present is on completing a number of key S106 agreements associated with major residential applications and managing risks associated with complex and controversial planning decisions, plus planning enforcement activity.

### **Staffing**

21. We have recently been successful in appointing Senior and Planning officer posts into the Development Management Team. However, there are currently 2 Principal Officer vacancies and recruiting at this level is proving difficult, both here and at the City Council (refer appendix 14). The Service will be exploring how we may need to respond to this national challenge through the spring, as the proposals for phase 2 of the shared service emerge. A new recruitment microsite is already in development to improve the authorities "shop window" for future recruitment rounds.
22. There is currently one agency staff member supporting Development Management.

### **Consultation responses**

23. No consultation has taken place on the content of this report.

## Effect on Strategic Aims

24. We will listen to and engage with residents, parishes and businesses to ensure we deliver first class services and value for money
25. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee contributes to this strategic aim as it challenges decision takers and holds them to account as part of its deliberations and is looking to ensure the Planning Service meets this aim.

## Background Papers

Where [the Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) require documents to be open to inspection by members of the public, they must be available for inspection: -

- (a) at all reasonable hours at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council;
- (b) on the Council's website; and
- (c) in the case of documents to be available for inspection pursuant to regulation 15, on payment of a reasonable fee required by the Council by the person seeking to inspect the documents at the offices of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Appendix 1 - Major performance

Appendix 2 - Minors performance

Appendix 3 - Others performance

Appendix 4 – Applications throughput and on – hand

Appendix 5 – Applications received/valid/invalid/workings days

Appendix 6 - % validated within 5 working days

Appendix 7 – Use of Extension of time

Appendix 8 – Performance against appeals designation

Appendix 9 – Customer service complaints/compliments/service requests

Appendix 10 – Applications validated per month

Appendix 11 – Majors validated per month

Appendix 12 – Minors validated per month

Appendix 13 – Others validated per month

Appendix 14 – Staff structure and current vacancies

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